

BRANDWOOD END CEMETERY

KINGS HEATH



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KINGS NORTON was one of the largest administrative districts surrounding Birmingham at the end of the nineteenth century. The huge and rapid increase in population during the 1880s which

followed the introduction of rail and tram routes from the expanding town into the southern suburbs created considerable pressure on burial space within this ancient parish. The existing graveyards were closed for new burials and could not be extended. The local authority resolved to establish a cemetery in the north of the district where population growth was greatest but experienced some difficulty in finding a suitable site. In 1892 a proposed cemetery at Billesley in the neighbouring parish of Yardley had to be abandoned when the Yardley authorities objected to the scheme. An area of farmland was finally acquired for the purpose at Brandwood End near Kings Heath in 1895, this time within the parish of Kings Norton.

lies four and a half miles south of Birmingham city centre in the suburb of Kings Heath. Established by Kings Norton Rural District Council and opened for burial in 1899 it became the property of Birmingham City Council in 1911 when the city boundaries were extended under the Greater Birmingham Act. The semi-detached mortuary chapels were added to the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest in August 1997.

BRANDWOOD END CEMETERY was formally opened on 13th April 1899 by George Tallis, Chairman of the Cemetery Committee. The Bishop of Coventry consecrated the Church of England chapel

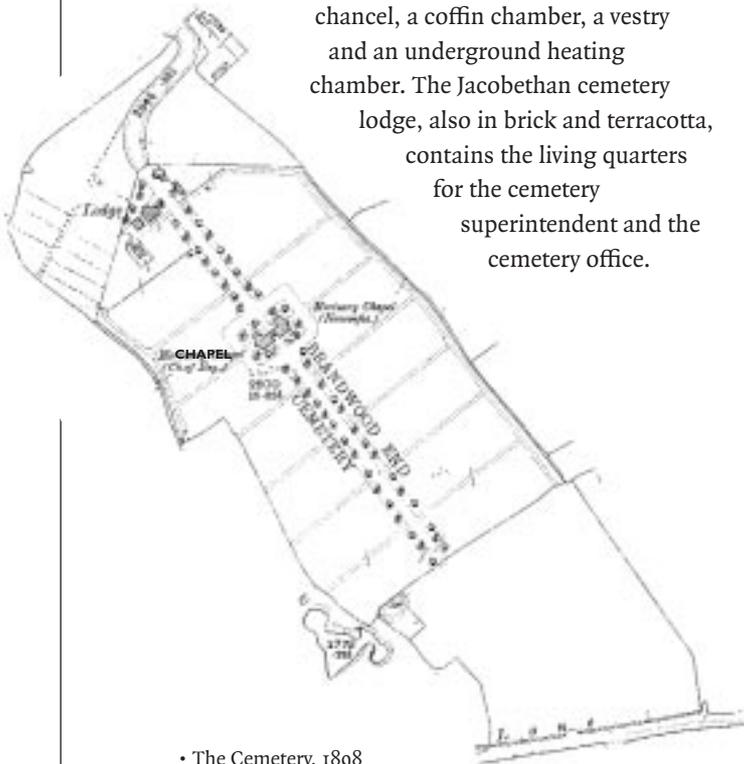
and the ground to the west of the cemetery's central drive reserved for Anglican burial. The mortuary chapel and the ground to the east of the drive was reserved for Non-Conformists. The first interment took place on 15th April 1899.

THE CEMETERY authorities have continued to acquire land, buying ground to the west of the original purchase in 1915 and to the east in 1917, 1920 and 1950. Further small parcels of ground were acquired in 1967 and in 1996. In 1919 two acres of land in the south of the original purchase were sold to the Jewish community known as 'The Old Beth Hamedrash' for use as a cemetery. Their burial ground contains a simple octagonal mortuary chapel.

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J. BREWIN HOLMES, a Birmingham architect, designed the mortuary chapels and the cemetery lodge. The semi-detached red brick and terracotta chapels are built in the Gothic style, which had come to be associated with Christian burial by this time. Joined by a carriage entrance surmounted by a tower and spire, each chapel is a mirror image of the other. Both contain a chancel, a coffin chamber, a vestry and an underground heating chamber. The Jacobethan cemetery lodge, also in brick and terracotta, contains the living quarters for the cemetery superintendent and the cemetery office.



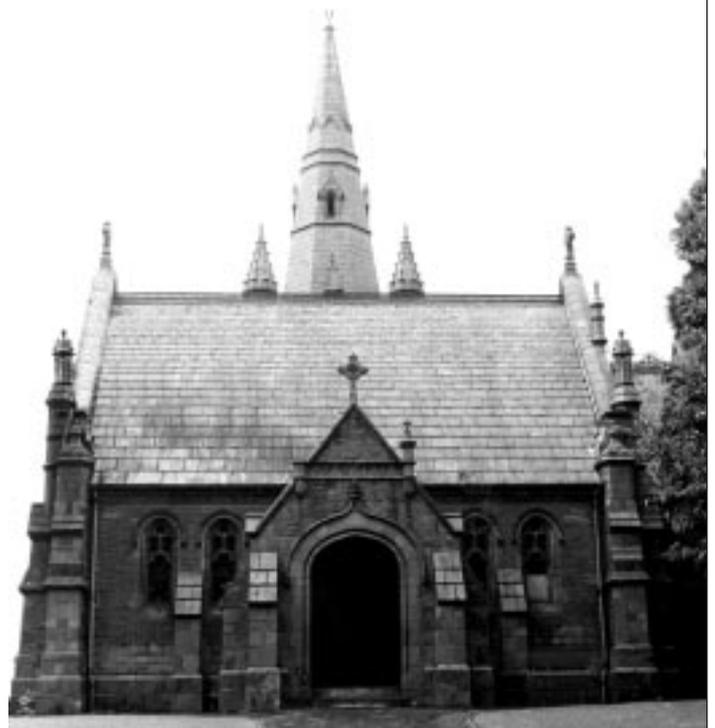
• The Cemetery, 1898

THE LAYOUT for the narrow rectilinear site of the original burial ground was drawn up by the district surveyor and is a superb example of late Victorian grid plan cemetery design. A grand central driveway runs from north to south across the cemetery grounds, passing through the carriageway under the chapel tower. Subsidiary paths run from east to west dividing the burial ground into sections. Later extensions continue the grid plan form. The mortuary chapels stand at the highest point in the grounds and provide a dramatic focus in the design of the landscape, especially when viewed from the central driveway. The cemetery lodge stands near the main entrance gates which still retain their ornamental metal lantern cradles.

THE CEMETERY was originally planted with the mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs popular at the turn of the century. The magnificent evergreen planting is largely confined to the earliest part of the burial ground and includes avenues of Scots pine, cypress and Wellingtonia. Their dark green foliage provides a striking contrast with the red terracotta of the chapels. The deciduous planting includes horsechestnut, beech, hornbeam and poplar.

THE MOST impressive monuments are grouped round the chapels and illustrate a range of early twentieth century styles from the Italian marble angels of the Edwardian period to the Art Deco memorial tablets of the 1930s. A Cross of Sacrifice, erected in 1929 in memory of those who died in the Great War, stands in the central avenue. Below this on the east of the drive lies the Memorial Garden laid out in 1952 in memory of the civilian war dead.

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